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Janina Glaeser, Monika Kupczyk

## Caring for recognition – young women on their way

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative research – based on biographical narrative interviews – is to trace the migration strategies of two young female domestic workers in private households in Germany. The authors interpret their agency mainly as a successful practice of “coping”. The analysis of the case studies reveals that biographical resources, language skills, aspects of class, nation state policies and expectations of the future intersect within the emancipation process. Care and domestic work functions as a strategy to realize long-term migration and thereby emphasizes its fundamental value in societies.

**Keywords:** care and domestic work, migration policies, biographical recourses, class-mobility, agency

## 1 Introduction

Currently there are increasing numbers of care and domestic workers in many modern households all over Europe, employed primarily to take care of children and the elderly. A rather “new” aspect of this phenomenon is its international dimension with a strong gender shift, owing to the fact that these care and domestic workers are often migrant women from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia or South America. They migrate to rich countries to support their families back home, for other political or personal reasons, or to gain economic independence. This trend reflects not only the globalization of the labor market and a world-wide feminization of migration but also the shift of exploitation and dependence from a national to an international context. The care and domestic workers issue is no longer a matter of class, but also one of ethnicity and nationality. A lot of international researchers have put a feminist concern on their agenda, which emphasizes the vital role of care and domestic work in reproducing human life. They claim that private as well as public care and domestic work has to undergo a re-politicization that allows it to gain moral and economic recognition (cf. e.g. Apitzsch 1995, 2008; Grasmuck/Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Rerrich 2006; Sassen 1998; Tronto 1993, 2002). Ways of re-producing family and gender orders change throughout

history. Migrant women in the early twenty-first century face the realities of transnational lives, which are often connected to duties of care-work as a way to make a living. They deal with person- and performance-oriented tasks such as: cleaning, cooking, and caring. Hence gendered so-called “3C’s” jobs are a significant area of employment.

In this article we concentrate on the biographical case studies of two young women (18 and 22 years old), who – due to different circumstances – migrated to Germany and started to work in the 3C’s job sector. By focusing on Devi’s and Magda’s narratives, we explore the role this kind of work plays in their life stories. It will be crucial to find out more about the value of household and care tasks that are represented in the light of a generation of young migrant workers.

Analyzing their social realities, we have noticed some differences to traditional concepts whose focus usually is on seclusion, hard work, long hours, shameless exploitation and suffering of migrant care and domestic workers. Indeed, researchers have found out that “new life” abroad is connected with hard work, loneliness, exploitation, i.e. living on the margins of society (cf. e.g. Anderson 2000, Hochschild 2001, Hess 2002, Parreñas 2001, Lutz 2008); and that it is particularly demanding for middle-aged women, to whom care and domestic work might be the only accessible source of income to support their families left behind (cf. e.g. Morokvasic-Muller 2003, Satola 2011). However, our research revealed that the act of migration in connection with an occupation in cleaning, cooking and caring may also be interpreted as *a chance to gain autonomy*. Many so-called “Gastarbeiter” worked in Germany’s industry from the 60s onwards; they mostly came from Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey and were principally male. Unlike them, entering the post-industrial phase, female care and domestic migrant workers today mobilize a *gendered potential* for care. In contrast to industrial workers, they do not produce goods, but offer services. Thereby they use opportunities of a 3C’s labor shortage as a strategy towards “better life”.

## 2 Method and case studies

In our study we used biographical narrative interviews to find out more about the significance of domestic and care work of young women in the modern world. Biographical research helps us to focus on the success or failure of these care and domestic workers, and on their degree of activity and compelling “trajectories”<sup>1</sup> respectively (cf. Schütze 1981). To explore a phenomenon from the perspective of an involved person, out of his or her subjectively reconstructed life story, allows for better understanding it as a *process* (cf. Kohli 1978; Schütze 1983). The narrator will describe her or his past experiences; her or his present situation and what she or he feels about it, and shall talk about her or his views about the anticipated future, hopes, and wishes. The function of the interview (and its transcription into a text) is to give information about what it refers to – the reality that is beyond the transcript (cf. Rosenthal 1995, pp. 14, 22).

For this paper, out of fifteen cases collected we have chosen two contrasted cases: the one of Devi, a twenty-one-year-old woman who migrated from Nepal to Germany in 2009 and worked as an au pair (although the au pair program in

Germany is officially declared as a cultural exchange program, it is mainly used to compensate care and domestic deficits). And the case of Magda, a thirty-six-year old woman who migrated from Poland to Germany in 2000 and started to earn money with domestic work. These two cases attracted our attention, because both Devi and Magda construct their trajectories as success stories.

We were able to collect these cases from our respective field-work during a research collaboration of several years between French and German (post-)doctorial candidates and professors at the University of Strasbourg and at the Goethe-University of Frankfurt. Both our PhD-projects focus on migration and care and make use of biographical narratives<sup>2</sup>. The analysis followed an abductive approach (Ch. S. Peirce 1960), and significant sequences were carefully chosen for more extensive interpretations. The chosen narratives arose from Polish, German and French backgrounds and different languages. As the French-German seminar was itself composed of researchers from diverse countries the quality of the analysis was improved by their various interpretations. A range of issues and dimensions emerged of whom the following will be compared: biographical resources, language skills, aspects of class and their relation to nation state policies. First let us take a closer look at the life stories.

### 3 Devi's case study

#### 3.1 Family background

Devi was born in India where she went to school until 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Meanwhile her father moved to Korea and her mother to Nepal. From a lack of information concerning their trajectories we can only assume their motives. Migration from India to Nepal and not reverse is rather unusual. Still we have reason enough to interpret that her parents migrated due to employment reasons. Devi joined her mother and her younger sister in Nepal where she finished high school. For a couple of years they lived the life of a middle-class family in Nepal where her mother is still working for a Swiss company.

#### 3.2 Migration and significant others

After her final secondary-school examinations in Nepal she checked the possibilities of migrating to Europe. Her mother's acquaintances with German employees opened a network:

"See, I always wanted to come to Germany, to learn the language. And then I talked to the friend of my mother, how life is like in Germany and so on, because I knew him. And then somehow he heard of a German couple who needed an au pair, because they had adopted a Nepalese child. And after that he recommended me to them. Yes, and next I decided, okay, and then it is also a good experience."

Devi's motivation to migrate seems to be influenced by educational aspirations that are linked to the migration experience of her parents who improved their living standards through labor migration. Whereas father and mother migrated within Asia, Devi wishes to advance her career by migrating to a Western society. Economy plays a crucial role and money earned in Germany is a lot worth in Nepal. The idea to migrate for economic reasons was successfully tested and then passed on to Devi by her parents. The transnational lifestyle her family cultivates by periodically living apart from each other is not being prolonged by their daughter's initiative. This migration project was relevant for the *whole* family, as Devi was and still is meant to become an important bread-winner. This seems plausible considering the low level of old-age insurances in Nepal, where children traditionally ensure health and wealth of the elderly. Mother and daughter cooperated to negotiate the terms of her migration. "The role of the provider of the family, traditionally assigned to males, has to be resumed by the remaining women of the family – the daughter(s). Consequently, the feminized mutual assistance also decreases the influence of the male."

### 3.3 Effects of migration

When she migrated from Nepal to Germany in 2009 Devi was eighteen years old. She used an au-pair visa issued for one year and therefore entered on regular grounds. However, from the beginning of their actual acquaintance an economic discrepancy between Devi and her host family leads to problems of class:

"((Giggling)) So, I didn't know my family, you know?! And this airport was really big. And there I had my first shock. The airport in Nepal is very small but then I looked around and I knew nobody, and so I went to the information centre and I thought: Oh, nobody was looking for an au pair from Nepal. And then my host family arrived. And at first glance I was scared, because ((laughing)) like real German, you know, they looked in apple-pie order ((laughing)). I got a shock. .. ((Laughing)) ... To be honest I could not stay with them. We have a lot of class differentiation. They come from a rich family; I come from a middle class family. It doesn't fit. I was displeased with them. [Why?] For example I felt under pressure somehow. For example they were always right and wouldn't listen to my opinion. Ehm, okay, for example, music. They go to the opera a lot. And these tickets are very expensive and they like the music. But I like modern music. Katy Perry or Beyoncé and when I say: No, I like Katy Perry or Beyoncé, they say: No. They always say they know better."

Obviously the "social habitus" of her host parents – the way they live, speak, dress and their personal tastes (cf. Bourdieu 1982) – scares Devi as much as it annoys her. Similar problems occur with the child she has to take care of:

"The child is actually Nepalese. Yes, he has been adopted by German parents. But yes, he is a bit selfish, because he is rich and hasn't learned how to behave. I mean, he thinks, poor people are, you know, he does not play with poor kids or does not know how to behave with older people."

A mutual closeness between Devi and the child does not turn up; they share ethnicity, but this is obviously not enough. It is not Devi's awareness of class differences that is the 'problem' (such is the case for all care workers) but it is her will to stay proud of her own values. As a self-assertive person she is not afraid to assess, the 'worth' of her host family according to her own criteria. She stigmatizes

the child as a spoiled product of a wealthy German household. Quite ironically, the interpersonal consequences of the global ‘rich North’ – ‘poor South’ division manifest themselves in a “privileged” couple adopting a “poor” child from the South, and eventually reach an unsatisfying and disillusioning peak in the private sphere.

Over the course of time Devi learns that Germany, that from afar looks “like a land of dreams”, is actually a very complex context, full of difficulties, especially, when it comes to practice interpersonal communication and to organize one’s rights to stay (i.e. the issue of “papers”). Devi experiences suffering as she struggles to explain her needs and interests adequately. Unlike Magda – as we will see – she quickly identifies the importance of getting proficient language skills in order to be successfully integrated into German society. As the host family’s child is very busy attending special educational courses such as Chinese and piano lessons, Devi uses her free time to foster her own language skills. She had already started taking German courses in Nepal, and she goes on with it eagerly at the “Volkshochschule” (an adult education center), taking extra courses in addition to those compulsory for au pairs. Besides, Devi has made friends with other women from around the world who often seem to meet at the “Volkshochschule”. Language skills are fundamental to Devi because they did not only help her to cross the border to Germany (level A1 of the European reference agreement is required), but they are also vital to articulate her needs and to carry on negotiations within the German society. The following quote illustrates her will to argue:

“Ehm yes, the second day I went to the Volkshochschule and I had to do a text and I had to apply for something, but that I had to apply for, I t o t a l l y d i d n o t understand ((laughing)). And this woman didn’t speak English. Also she was very rude. Not well-behaved. .. Ehm, and in Nepal I had finished the A-levels. Till German-level 2. Again I took a test in Volkshochschule and I got fewer points. And they said: You have to repeat the course A1. But I didn’t understand and I always discussed it all through ((laughing)). A2, A3 ((laughs very much)). Yes.”

As she deals with institutional authorities a longing for human dignity mixes with cultural ideas of what counts as sophistication. Obviously, language is a key factor to remain self-assertive in those foreign institutions where one employee decides on the migrants’ qualifications. Furthermore, language skills are essential for the next step of Devi’s plans: to pass successfully the entrance examination for university.

### 3.4 Career and further life in Germany

Devi aims indeed at becoming a student of economics in Germany. Against the background of these prospects, doing care and domestic work plays a minor role in her plans. However it provides a safe inclusion into Germany’s legal rules. With regard to the process of obtaining an au-pair visa she states: “Eh, they have invited me. And ehm then I learned diligently German and I got a Visa easily. I had no problems because of the visa ((laughing)). My papers were always correct ((laughing)).” According to the German Parliament’s last report (2005) on the situation of au-pair employees, there are no specific policies for the employment of these care workers. In 1969 the Council of Europe passed a European agreement on the employment policies of au pair workers; but Germany has not ratified it until today

(cf. Deutscher Bundestag 2005, p. 2). Furthermore, the employment of au pairs is part of a deregulation process that concerns for instance recruitment agencies. However, in private households it is connected to some national rules which are subject to private employment agreements and safety regulations (a maximum of 30 hours of work per week, free board and lodging, an allowance of 260 Euros per month ...) (cf. Konjunkturumfrage 2011, pp. 27–28). Devi is not a member of the European Union (EU) therefore she had to obtain a visa. Different departments (embassy or consulate, Federal Employment Office, office for foreigners) had to verify if she meets the requirements, such as having a real au pair prospect and sufficient language skills. The care-work only enabled her to come to Germany and to pursue her educational plans, but it is not of predominant value to her. It provides economic security to her, but it is only a temporary means to her true goal: to study economics at university, and hence move upward socially. Paradoxically, for her au pair is merely a stepping stone towards a better professional future – it is not her fulfillment but just as much the condition to approach fulfillment. It provides the possibility to get to know the “recipes” of acting (cf. Schütz 1944, p. 80) in a system that is unknown to her and to whom she is stranger during her legalized first year in Germany as an au pair. In turn, living in Germany permanently and studying in Germany looks promising.

Today, five years later, Devi has realized her plans: she is a student of economics who is self-financing her upper education in a field unrelated to care work.

## 4 Magda’s case study

### 4.1 Family background

Magda was born in 1978 in one of the larger cities in Poland. During socialism it was a major centre of industry. Under the economic transition in the 1990s its industry collapsed. Consequently, the inhabitants suffered from high unemployment, poverty, crime and alcohol abuse. Until the age of 22 she lived with her parents and her 5 years younger brother visiting kindergarten, primary school (8 years), high school (4 years) and college (2 years). She does not mention her family or speak much about the life she led before her migration. Only when asked she admits that she is from a lower middle-class family, in which both parents were doing some bureaucratic jobs. A few years after Magda’s migration to Germany, her father decided to go to Scotland, where he is working in a shopping mall doing night shifts, because he was made redundant from his last job in Poland and could not find a new one. Magda’s mother joined her husband shortly after, when she went into early retirement. Therefore we can assume that Magda cannot expect any significant economic help from her parents. Magda’s brother still lives in Poland with his wife and daughter. This transnational family stays in contact via Skype or telephone on a daily basis, often visiting each other and commuting between three countries organizing common holidays, family celebrations or Christmas.

## 4.2 Migration and significant others

The story of Magda's migration is tightly bound to the life story of Robert, her high school love, who later became her husband. In terms of migration he was also a "significant other" for her. Robert already experienced living abroad. As a teenager he spent a couple of years in Germany attending school and, as Magda says, "was already acquainted with life in Germany. It had influenced his mentality, lifestyle etc." By pointing out these differences between her and her husband Magda stresses the contrast of their respective socialization patterns. Robert, after his family's "Germany-episode" and their return to Poland, wanted to become (financially) independent. Still a teenager, he migrated back to Germany again and again, mainly during his school holidays in Poland, to work on a construction site. At some point, he gave up school without completing his A-levels and decided to work abroad in order to earn some money for his life with Magda in Poland. Meanwhile, Magda graduated from college and, after a short time, followed him to Germany in 2000. In comparison to their economically stagnating hometown, moving to one of the richest cities in West Germany seemed to offer more autonomy. It was also a big change in Magda's life as she previously "had a normal teenage life" filled "with some parties, drinking large amounts of alcohol, the first escapes from home, a little bit of everything." Yet, together with Robert, she took a mature decision. Love and the common goal to achieve the still lacking economical wealth to start their independent adult life influenced their work and migration activities. Both assumed that their stay in Germany would only be temporary.

## 4.3 Effects of migration

The first months after Magda's migration were difficult for her: "The first few months were gruesome, because I couldn't find my place in here, I did not like this place, I didn't know any one, and it wasn't good for me." Everything in the new surrounding was unfamiliar: the language, the people, and the culture. She suffered from depressive moods. Her expectations, perspectives and motivation of starting an independent adult life were getting stronger, but at the same time she had to put a lot of effort in re-directing her life and adjusting it according to the new surroundings. She decided to be more active in looking for new possibilities and to take emerging chances. She experienced *exclusion* due to *language problem*, and became aware of the need to learn German in order to understand the complexity of the new culture:

"So all the problems with integration here, I can understand what they are all about, because this is, this is terrible! When you do not speak German here you cannot do anything, you cannot be integrated, and there is no chance. So ... this first year was hard: not knowing the language."

She felt isolated, alone and totally dependent (also financially) on her partner Robert. He was the one who – with the help of his own network – supported her in finding her first job, in which she worked for the following years. Finally, getting a job as a domestic worker helped her to reorganize her daily routine, to gain self-confidence and financial independence.

Magda's life story shows some specific and actually often observed aspects of Polish female domestic workers' lives in Germany. Like many other women



performing this kind of work, she started with the assumption that this job would be “only for one year”. She ended up doing it for 10 years. And, like a lot of other Polish female workers, she was employed on an irregular basis in many households. Magda started to work as a domestic worker in 2000. At that time Poland was not yet a member of the EU; it joined it in 2004, and only in 2007 it became part of the Schengen Agreement. Before 2004 the only possibility for Polish citizens to legalize their stay in Germany was getting a three-months tourist visa. That is why Magda, like lots of other migrant workers, was commuting between her home country and the country of employment every couple of months. Under the wavering Schengen migration policy, getting the permission to stay and work seemed almost impossible to her. She did not have any further plans for her life in Germany: her plans for the future concentrated on returning to Poland. Assuming that migration would be temporary, Magda was ready to work on an irregular basis. When Poland entered the EU in 2004 she decided to legalize her stay in Germany. This shift in the EU migration policy – and Germany’s implementation of this policy – helped her to stabilize her life. She got a work permit along with the possibility to take a regular job as a self-employed cleaner. However, she preferred to continue domestic work on an illegal basis because it was more profitable and she wanted “to live prosperously”.

Not knowing the German language was a significant obstacle in Magda’s migration experience. Initially she would communicate with her clients exclusively in English; it is only after six months, when she took up a language course, that she slowly started to speak German. Little by little Magda not only learned the language, which enabled her to gradually participate in society, but she also made friends. Then she decided to try to study at a German university. To achieve this goal she attended an intensive language course and then successfully passed the admission exams. She started her studies with Politics as her major, and Media and History of Eastern Europe as a minor. However, during that time she expanded her own network of clients and kept on working as a domestic worker. She saved money and visited Poland a couple of times a year, preparing for their comeback. Thus, Magda and her husband bought a flat in Poland and even fully furnished it.

#### 4.4 Career and further life in Germany

But in the meantime they both changed their plans: they decided to stay in Germany. As Magda says: “All these decisions were made up simultaneously: I started this study, we found that here in Germany is our home.” In the interview, contradictions of “here/there” seem to be very important to her, bringing into light the topic of *belonging*. She now sees her life as divided along time and space in two successive parts: the time *before* migration is connected to her life “there” in Poland, and the time *after* her migration means her life “here” in Germany. While “back there” she lost some friends, she gained new friends “here”, and closer ties were set up. This new location (“here”), connected with the experience of migration, also gave her new opportunities and life perspectives. She already had a plan she wanted to realize “there” in Poland, because: “(...) everything in my life was arranged from A to Z.” But then she had to adjust it to the new circumstances: after the time of pendular migration she finally changed her mind about what was

“here” and what was “there”. Deciding that her place of belonging was in Germany helped her to get on the way towards a “better life”, which she now wants to spend “here”, not “there”. Because “here” she has built her “home”, a basis for her life activities, a place she belongs to, where she lives, shares her life and always wants to come back to.

Shortly after this change of mind took place Magda decided to give up her studies. She was still in her first year; and through the whole period she had successfully combined work with studying according to her self-made daily schedule. She had established a daily routine: mornings she was usually spending at the university, taking different courses; afternoons she would do her cleaning jobs. When she gave up her studies she gained some spare time. She could get more cleaning jobs. But as domestic work was not fulfilling to her, she decided to look for other options; such as finding a job in an office, which she had always wanted.

She took step after step: (...) “we bought ourselves a dog and a year later Lara was born. The dog was a breakthrough, because having a dog was a first step to decide on having a child; and coming back to the work issue, I changed my job for a better one.” Magda is working in an office today, happy with this kind of job. Robert started his own construction company, which has become a prosperous business. This has enabled the couple to buy a house on the outskirts of the German town they are still living in.

## 5 Comparison

Devi and Magda, two young women coming from different corners of the world, decided at some point in their life to come to Germany. Both of them were at an early age. Devi was 18 and Magda was 22. Poland shares a border with Germany, whereas Nepal is about 6500 kilometers away from Germany. The reasons they had to leave their homeland were not the same, but there are also similarities in their process of migration.

### 5.1 Biographical resources

According to Standing “the term ‘migrant’ comes with historical baggage and covers a multitude of types of experience and behavior” (Standing 2011, p. 90). Hence the reasons for migration can be as different as different life courses are. In the context of our research, Devi and Magda both assumed that the journey to a new country would be a way to redirect their lives, a step into another part of life, first and foremost conscious of having life in front of them. For Magda it was supposed to be only a temporary sojourn in Germany, tightly connected with the possibility of earning money; whereas Devi rapidly decided to try to stay and study in Germany. Their decision to leave for Germany was influenced by “significant others” and circumstances life had already brought to them. *Personal experiences*, – also referred to as ‘biographical’ or “subjective resources” – (Delcroix 2001, p. 73; she also uses the expression “capital (spécifique) d’expérience biographique”) are crucial factors for individual acting strategies:

“One has to comprehend under *subjective resources* the physical, mental and moral energies an individual possesses and develops at a given moment of his existence, as well as the knowledge and the know-how that enables him to mobilize these energies (...) to meet the needs and realize family and personal projects.” (Delcroix 2009, p. 144; transl. by JG)

For Magda, taking the decision to migrate emerged out of previous experiences she had already made in life, as well as from family-relations. But it was in fact her partner who originally initiated the first trips to Germany. She joined him because by working in Germany she wanted to gain financial independence and prepare for a secured family life in a familiar neighborhood in Poland. Her expectations were thus entirely tied to partnership demands. She has experienced sensations of close local alliances to others in life and feels responsible for her immediate environment.

By comparison, Devi’s life in Germany seems more autonomous. She planned her migration with the approval of her family that was already acquainted with transnational life. A place of belonging had never been clearly defined on a specific territory. She was used to be separated from her family, who itself was on the move. The migration experience of both her mother and father that had brought and kept bringing economic resources has been passed on. Devi does not have to take direct care of others of her own kin; but she is expected to improve her and her family’s status through migration. Nepal is a poor country. Whereas Magda constantly renews and successively prolongs her migration period, Devi profits from already being an experienced transmigrant. It is all the more interesting that Magda, who expects to stay for a short time and to do care-work temporarily, at times irregularly, gets stuck in it for a long range of years until she can catch hold of her goals, and eventually achieves satisfaction when deciding to stay in Germany. By contrast Devi, who was preparing for a long-term, legal stay abroad and to do care-work temporarily, has realized her plans within a single year.

## 5.2 Language barriers

According to Eisenstadt “the process of immigration is a process of physical transition from one society to another. Through it, the immigrant is taken out of a more or less stable social system and transplanted into another” (1952, p. 225). The migration of a person to another country is, due to this “uprooting process”, loaded most often with feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. This process implies breaking bonds with familiar social, political and cultural surroundings; problems with identity and self-esteem; but also loss of well-known interaction frames within a symbolic universe of common language and values (Han 2010, pp. 198–219). Quite aptly, Devi called it straight away a “culture shock”. To both Devi and Magda, the experience of moving to the unfamiliar symbolic universe of Germany was difficult. To both of them, language – their ignorance of the local language, their difficulties in communicating in everyday life – clearly appeared as the main problem. Their own experiences of not being able to express oneself, one’s own thoughts and wishes pushed them to the effort of learning German. Becoming able to communicate with locals meant a key step in their life, leading to other steps forward.

In an ongoing debate in 2010 Angela Merkel stated: “Those who want to take part [in our society] must not only obey our laws, they must also master our lan-

guage” (Merkel 2010). Aware of this argumentation, Magda admits that learning the local language is the first and most important step to fit into the receiving society and to avoid exclusion. To Devi it is essential for her “career” options and for negotiating her needs. Comparatively, Devi progressed faster in German and socialized with other German-speaking people, whereas Magda – who spoke Polish with her partner – slowly reactivated some forgotten German from her high school times: her plan of returning to Poland decreased her motivation. But when she finally started with domestic work she built a social net of people who spoke German. Her work, but especially her decision to stay in Germany finally made her advance her knowledge of German. And with it, new possibilities appeared. Finally, both of them passed the entrance language examination to university in Germany.

We can state that language skills in these two cases are one of the most important assets or ‘capitals’ these migrant domestic workers had to acquire. Language constitutes both the medium of everyday communication and a resource for education and work purposes. Linguistic competence in the relevant national language can be a symbol of belonging; and it plays a crucial role in terms of access to education, income, central institutions, societal recognition and social contact.

### 5.3 Class-mobility

Next to language, class differences also appear as quite relevant. For Magda it was difficult at first to live in Germany because of the difference between standards of living in Poland and Germany. Devi’s critical stand against her host family’s upper class education, manners, tastes and what she perceived as arrogance is a forthright critique of class constellations. The link she establishes between their wealth and their attitudes and values reminds one of *The German Ideology*, according to which the material conditions determine the hegemonic production of ideas (cf. Marx/Engels 1846, p. 46). Class is commonly understood as relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, status and/or power; it is a most common belief and, as ‘internalised society’s belief’ it is used/ practiced in everyday social-interactions (Kemper/ Weinbach 2009, pp. 12–23).

For a better understanding it is useful to refer to the concept of *classism*, that is: the assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class, individual attitudes and behaviors; systems of policies and practices set up to benefit more class-privileged people at the expense of the less class-privileged people, resulting in drastic income and wealth inequality; the rationale and the culture which support and perpetuates these systems and this unequal valuing (SOA Watch 2011, pp. 44–46). In our research, it occurred to us that although Devi and Magda are aware of their position in the class hierarchy of the receiving society, they do not agree to be treated differently by “a system of beliefs and cultural attitudes that ranks people according to economic status, family lineage, job status, level of education, and other divisions” (SOA Watch 2011, pp. 44–46). The experience of migration has clearly shown them how deep these social inequalities are, and how deep the dominant society’s beliefs and attitudes can be internalized. The upper- and middle-class people as well as poor- or working-class people internalize both the social rules of inequality and justification of such status quo. Whereas internalized classism is the acceptance and justification of classism by working

class and poor people (subordinated groups), the internalized superiority is the acceptance and justification of class privilege by upper- and middle-class (dominant group members).

Devi is fully aware of class differences, not only economic ones but also cultural and social ones. Her migration project has been deeply influenced by biographical resources about transnational experiences that her parents passed on to her. She is therefore fully aware of migration's potential for upward class mobility. While coming from a middle-class background she nevertheless experiences a loss in status when landing in an upper-class German family. In societal perception, upper- and middle-class people are usually seen as more articulate and sophisticated than working-class and poor people. This 'legitimacy' allows the dominant group to define for everyone else what is "normal" or "acceptable" in the class hierarchy (Kemper/ Weinbach 2009, pp. 12–23). In this context, listening to classical music appears just "normal" for upper-class members, here Devi's guest-parents, whereas Devi's pop music tastes are clearly "unacceptable". But Devi disagrees: she refuses to be governed by these "classism-conditions" and, like Magda, she aims to improve her own material wealth (which may have influenced her to choose economics as a subject) in order to balance her loss of status in Germany while reinforcing her family's status back in Nepal.

As for Magda, in terms of class affiliation she was part of a subordinated social group *both* in the host society and already in Poland. A way for Magda to improve her situation was to raise her socio-economic status. Both she and her partner went to Germany in order to save part of their earnings and, later on, to live in Poland as a middle-class family. Magda does not think in terms of class constellations (for instance she never uses the words 'class' or 'social hierarchy'). But her job as domestic worker helped her to somehow restore balance with her partner, and also to pursue new career plans: to study and to find work in an office. Consequently, wages to her were means on her way to an autonomous life.

## 5.4 Nation-state policies

Devi managed to include herself in the legalized nation-state policies. Such an entrance to Germany was provided by her language skills as well as her status as an au pair, which allowed her to obtain a Visa. During that year Devi prepared to become a student and passed the language entrance test successfully. Thus she was able to prove to the office for foreigners that she was engaged in an activity within one of the German institutions, the university. Congruently, she got her next Visa and was able to find a regular side job in the service sector after her year of au pair.

Magda, on the contrary, was often employed on an irregular basis. As the Schengen-agreement wasn't yet completely valid for Poland in 2004, her employment activities fell into a legal limbo; staying for three months as a tourist was allowed whereas working wasn't. She used to commute between Poland and Germany every few months. As Morokvasic-Muller claims, migrant women often use the geographic proximity to move back and forth from Poland to Germany as a way to escape from marginalization and – paradoxically – to avoid emigration: "To prevent being marginalized by social-economic changes of society, they launch themselves into an *economy bound to voyages* and try to improve their situation

by staying mobile as long as possible” (1999, p. 3; transl. by JG). In Magda’s case, this possibility to earn money in Germany but to come back to Poland regularly ends up in an exhausting struggle of identity and belonging. One may consider this problem as particularly relevant for young Polish migrant women who are planning to start a family. Older women often already have a resident family in Poland (cf. Satola 2010, p. 177). The temporary character is caused by the policies of the nation-state, who hesitates to legalize their work. Although the work of Polish migrants is nowadays legalized within the EU, they and other migrants from Eastern Europe often prefer to keep working without a legal status, due to a higher profit (cf. Karakayalı 2009, p. 91). On the basis of our research, low-paid legal work as an au pair appears to be more promising than better-paid illegal care and domestic work; migrant women who take the latter need to constantly commute between two nations.

## 6 Conclusion

In our article we asked about the role care and domestic work plays in the lives of migrant women performing “3C’s” work. On the basis of biographical interviews with two young migrant women, it turns out that the care and domestic work they have provided in German private households has been highly significant to both of them, especially in terms of socio-economic aspirations and higher education. Their success or failure has been strongly connected to nation-state policies, class mobility, the knowledge of language, and their own biographical resources. Their expectations were strongly connected to significant others such as Magda’s partner or Devi’s mother. In retrospect, Devi’s calculations emerge as not only more determined, but also more realistic. Devi’s plans to study after her au pair time materialized after about two years. Magda’s plans to come back to Poland after a year to start a family did not work out.

Magda moved constantly from Poland to Germany and back to Poland while earning money with domestic work in Germany. She worked with an illegal status, (whereas Devi had a legal one). After ten years of performing “3C’s”, she got a job in an office. The process of migration for Magda was very much dominated by the uncertainty of where to go and what to do. Her migration was influenced by the idea of a partnership and worthy family life. In reality she gradually had to modify and adjust her ideas to problems with language and finding a job. She suffered from depression, isolation and a shortage of money. Besides the possibility to return often to Poland seemed actually to decrease her ability to make cut-and-dried decisions and accumulated into years of struggling. But as there is always an element of uncertainty about the future, strategies towards a “better life” are sets of options rather than fixed plans. In this situation where the available resources for reaching her main goals were limited, Magda still found an option. The decision to settle and start a family in the receiving country was a turning point in Magda’s life.

Devi’s decisions in migration were more focused. Through the transmission of her parent’s transnational lifestyle she was determined to accumulate education with the long-term prospect to improve the economic wealth of her family. Care

and domestic work in the form of a year as au pair was meant to be like a stepping stone towards realizing these aspirations legally and efficiently. Nevertheless, she had to cope with the upper class habitus and economic “authority” of her host parents. Devi’s account shows how the re-emergence of migrant women who take care of children in wealthy households – as a consequence of the global ‘rich-poor’ decision – cause situations in which hierarchical interpersonal negotiations take place. During these negotiations biographical resources and language skills become essential to migrant care and domestic workers who are confronted with forms of internalized classism.

To both, Devi and Magda, care and domestic work appears as a possibility to get employed and to provide for oneself. The paradox is that the low status of such a kind of work is precisely what allows young migrant women to enter Germany: they transform it into an advantage. In turn, the fact that care work provides possibilities for entering a developed society gives it a fundamental value – although it is not named as such.

## Notes

- 1 Invented by Anselm Strauss, the concept of trajectory has been later on applied by Fritz Schütze to the process of suffering. Persons concerned get into a chain of incidents, a ‘trajectory of suffering’ which they cannot escape; they become progressively passive.
- 2 Janina Glaeser conducts the PhD-project “Transnational care-work in France and in Germany – a biographical policy-evaluation” with a focus on childminders. Monika Kupczyk does research on Polish migrants in Germany who work either on construction sites or as domestic workers in private households.

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